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ABSTRACT

Approaches to managing conflict in the collaborative process are discussed, along with the need for collaboration in schools. Collaboration by teachers, administrators, parents, and others can help identify problems, consider relevant data, plan and implement interventions, and evaluate results. However, the knowledge, experience, and values of team members may differ. Useful strategies for addressing conflict in the collaborative process included: "withdrawing," "forcing," "smoothing," "compromising," and "confronting." Active listening behaviors which support the conflict management strategies include: acknowledging the speaker verbally or nonverbally, paraphrasing the speaker's words, reflecting the speaker's emotions, clarifying what the speaker has stated, elaborating to help the speaker expand comments, and summarizing relevant data. A self-evaluation questionnaire listing 25 behaviors used in conflict management is appended. Contains eight references. (SW)

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Strategies for Managing Conflict in the Collaboration Process

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Strategies for Managing Conflict in the Collaboration Process

Presentation Delivered: ***COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN*** **NATIONAL CONVENTION INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA on APRIL 6, 1995**

Need for Collaboration in the Schools. Students arrive at the school door at all levels of readiness to learn. By the year 2000, one of every three students in our schools will be from an ethnic or national minority group (Hodgkinson, 1985). While this diversity enriches the experiences of all learners, in many cases it will challenge the teacher and other school personnel to develop ways of increasing the relevance of the curriculum and/or broaden teaching methods to assure that learning occurs for *all* students. To add further to the diversity of the classroom, another 10-25% of students has a learning or behavior problem which requires some modification in their educational program (Will, 1986).

School-based collaboration is a way of tackling educational tasks and problems, such as student diversity, in a structured manner which allows involvement by parents, teachers, administrators, and others. The collaborative process includes working together to 1) identify problems, 2) consider relevant data, 3) plan and implement interventions, and, finally, 4) evaluate results (Idol, Nevin, & Paolucci-Whitcomb, 1994). The two major keys to success in the collaboration process include establishing "joint ownership" of the task and "sharing leadership" in a way that demonstrates respect for the knowledge and experience of all members.

Role of Conflict in the Collaborative Process. While the strength of the collaborative process is in the diverse perspectives of those engaging in the

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process, those very differences can and will lead to conflict. Conflict is a naturally occurring phenomenon in groups or organizations, and . . . may result in improved functioning in the system (Thomas, Correa, Morsink, 1995). Zenger (1994) described this phenomenon as "storming," one of the four phases of team development: forming, storming, norming, and performing. In the "storming" phase, members of the group draw on their knowledge, experience, and values but do not always agree with other members. Well-managed conflict can lead to creative solutions and can hold great rewards for accomplishing the group's mission.

Managing Conflict. Johnson and Johnson (1991) have identified the following five strategies for addressing conflict in the collaboration process: withdrawing, forcing, smoothing, compromising and confronting. Each of these strategies has a useful function. To determine which strategy is most appropriate at a given time, thought must be given to the importance of both *goals* and *relationships* to the conflict being addressed. For example, "withdrawing" is an appropriate strategy when the relationship between two or more individuals is perceived to be more important than reaching the specific goal related to the conflict. This strategy is used productively when emotions are running at a high level. Typically, withdrawing temporarily is good practice to provide a "cooling off" time for all involved. Conversely, "forcing" may be appropriate when the goal of collaboration process is perceived as more important than the immediate relationship of members. For example, a

goal of placing of a student with disabilities in a general classroom setting may not please everyone even though all data and the law support such a placement. "Forcing" needs to be used sparingly as it can negatively affect the collaborative process.

"Smoothing" is another strategy which places relationships above goals. For example, when two members of the group are polarized on an issue, a third member may attempt to smooth the situation by pointing out points of agreement between the two who are disagreeing. "Compromising" is a middle of the road strategy. In this strategy, an attempt is made to modify two or more positions which maintaining relationships among members. Finally, the use of "confronting" holds both the goal and the relationships in high esteem. In this strategy, conflicts are viewed as problems to be solved and a means of improving relationships by reducing tension between two or more members of the collaborative team.

Johnson and Johnson (1991) emphasize that while all five strategies for managing conflict have a place in the collaborative process, "forcing" should be used infrequently while "confronting"--when done appropriately--has the best opportunity to accomplish the goal and maintain the relationships of the collaborative team.

Behaviors Related to Conflict Management Style. Specific active listening behaviors which support the strategies used to manage conflict have been identified (Gordon, 1980; West, Idol, & Cannon, 1989). These six

behaviors include: *acknowledging* the speaker verbally or non-verbally, *paraphrasing* the speaker's words, *reflecting* the speaker's emotions, *clarifying* what the speaker has stated, *elaborating* to help speaker expand comments, and *summarizing* to pull together relevant data.

Nature of the Presentation. The purpose of this presentation is to assist general and special educators to develop and/or refine their strategies and active listening behaviors to manage conflict in the collaborative process. The session objectives include: Participants will . . .

1. Increase their knowledge base regarding the role of conflict in the collaborative process.
2. Determine their current style of managing conflict (attached).
3. Role-play the six steps to manage conflict using appropriate active listening behaviors.

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Your Conflict Management Style: BEHAVIORS

Developed by Judith J. Ivarie, Ph.D.

Listed below are 25 behaviors used in conflict management. Select ten **(10)** of the behaviors that are most typical of *YOUR* style of conflict management.

___ 1. Digresses, changing the subject away from the conflict
___ 2. Appears to want other to consider his/her perspective
___ 3. Does not appear concerned about the goal
___ 4. Does not appear committed to the goal
___ 5. Appears willing to give up the goal if the other person will

___ 6. Physically coercive
___ 7. Appears to have a strong commitment to the goal
___ 8. Appears committed to the goal at all costs
___ 9. Defers to the other person
___10. Aggressive (attacking, overpowering, overwhelming, intimidating)

___11. Withdraws physically (e.g., leaves, turns away, avoids eye contact)
___12. Does not appear concerned about the relationship
___13. Does not appear committed to the relationship
___14. Appears to have a strong commitment to the relationship
___15. Appears committed to the relationship at all costs

___16. Reaching a solution appears more important than the goal OR relationship
___17. Withdraws psychologically (e.g., gazes off, turns out)
___18. Time sensitive (e.g., appears to want to get on to other matters)
___19. Appears committed to a "win-win" approach to the conflict
___20. Appears willing to consider the other's perspective

___21. Appears to set aside own needs
___22. Appears willing to take the time needed to reach a solution
___23. Appears to "give in"
___24. Treats conflict as a way to arrive at a workable solution
___25. Verbally coercive

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
F	W	S	Cf	Cp